

**To:** *League of Conservation Voters*  
**From:** *Jay Campbell, Hart Research*  
**Date:** *May 17, 2024*  
**Re:** *How the Public Views Arctic Protection and the Biden Legacy*

Hart Research recently completed a major study\* on public knowledge of and attitudes toward protecting the Arctic public lands in Alaska from drilling for oil and gas.

At the moment, individuals in these key states are blank slates for messaging when it comes to current and potential actions from the Biden administration to protect the Arctic. Only 23% in these states are even aware that drilling is currently allowed in the Arctic. But the survey finds that their desire to protect wildlife in Alaska, as well as to protect lands that Indigenous peoples rely on for their way of life, outweigh the potential benefits they perceive from drilling. And importantly, we find that **we can use Arctic-focused messaging to make the case that President Biden is taking real action on addressing climate change.**

This memorandum outlines the key findings from this survey.

**1) Arctic-related messages, as a frame for and illustration of President Biden's clean energy actions to date, make a strong case that he is taking real action on climate.**

Consistent with other polling, our survey finds a low level of awareness of the president's work to address climate change—just one in three (34%) say he has done a lot or a decent amount. But exposure to messaging about President Biden and Arctic protection changes the picture for those who hear it: the proportion who say he has done a lot or a decent amount increases 11 points, to 45%, with especially good movement among key base audiences—Democrats (15-point increase), Black individuals (16-point increase), and, critically, young people who say they care deeply about climate and conservation (22-point increase).

**2) Arctic protection can raise President Biden's favorability image appreciably.**

The survey asks how registered voters—who are most likely to be engaged in expressing their views on Arctic protection to their elected officials—would feel about President Joe Biden if he protected the Arctic in Alaska by limiting new oil and gas drilling. They say they would feel more favorable to him by a margin of three to one—47% more favorable, 16% less favorable. The reaction is considerably more positive with key segments of the public:

- Climate-focused under age 35 – 65% more favorable
- Latino individuals – 59% more favorable
- Black individuals – 52% more favorable

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\* 1,663 interviews conducted online among a representative sample of registered voters across nine states: AZ, GA, MI, MN, NC, NH, NV, PA, and WI. Credibility interval for the full sample is  $\pm 2.7$  percentage points.

**3) Three discrete policy proposals are highly and broadly popular and would help bolster the administration’s Arctic bona fides.**

Just under nine in 10 favor each of the following proposals:

<p><b>Conserving special places</b> in the Arctic that are important for the survival of endangered wildlife and Indigenous Alaska populations and preventing expanded oil and gas drilling in these areas.</p>	<b>89% favor</b>
<p>Requiring that before new oil and gas drilling projects are approved in the Arctic, <b>a scientific study must be conducted</b> to figure out what impact drilling in that area would have on climate change and nearby public lands.</p>	<b>87% favor</b>
<p>Naming some areas of the Arctic as <b>UNESCO World Heritage sites</b>, which gives them international recognition as places with special cultural and physical significance.</p>	<b>87% favor</b>

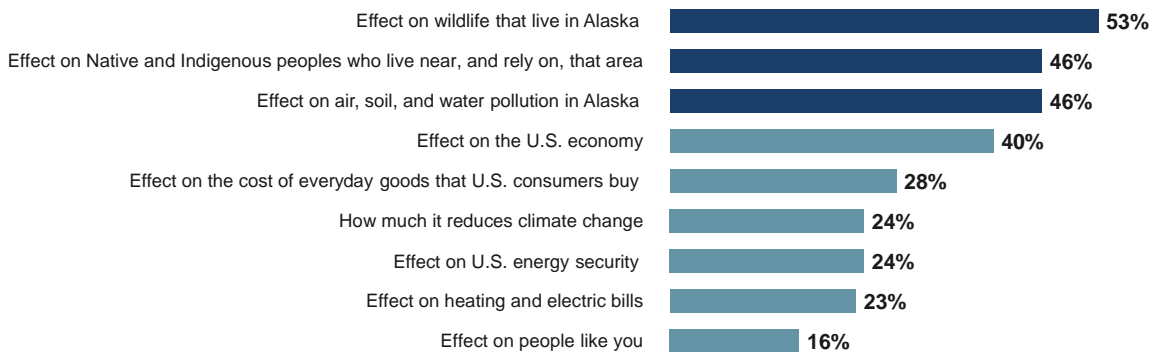
This support spans the electorate and includes typically pro-drilling audiences (eight in 10 Republicans and nearly nine in 10 rural residents favor each) as well those that tend to be highly sensitive to energy prices (over 80% of seniors and independents).

**4) For most people, the reasons to be against Arctic drilling have greater emotional resonance than the reasons to be in favor of it.**

Three facets of drilling in the Arctic rise to the top in importance, outweighing economic concerns such as energy prices:

**Wildlife, effects on Indigenous peoples, and pollution matter most.**

*Which three of these are most important to you in judging whether drilling for oil and gas in the Arctic in Alaska would be a good thing or not?*



This may seem counterintuitive; the factors that more directly affect people's lives (energy prices, energy security) are of lower importance to them when it comes to judging the value of drilling in the Arctic than more removed factors like wildlife, air pollution, and Indigenous people in Alaska. But it is clear that the emotional resonance of those factors is strong—especially around wildlife and wilderness, which are the greatest top-of-mind negative impacts of drilling that survey respondents cite. Leaning into that emotional timbre puts us on our strongest messaging ground.

This is not to suggest that we should fail to rebut inaccurate claims by industry or others that drilling limitations would increase prices for consumers; it will be essential to refute this disinformation when it arises (more on this below).

### **5) Messages centered on wildlife and Indigenous communities powerfully make the case for protecting the Arctic and President Biden's role in doing so.**

The following language about the effects of drilling on Native and Indigenous peoples tested very well, particularly among political independents, for whom it is the top-testing message:

***[INDIGENOUS]** President Biden would protect land in Alaska that Indigenous communities rely on for their way of life. The new protections would prioritize lands and waters that these communities use for hunting and fishing for food and ensure that their cultural traditions and ability to live in these areas continue for generations to come, instead of more oil and gas jobs that do not even go to local community members.*

A wildlife and wilderness message is strong across the board, testing in the top tier with most subgroups of the sample:

***[WILDLIFE HABITAT AND WILDERNESS]** President Biden's commitment to conserving America's wildlife would be nothing short of historic. The Arctic in Alaska is one of our nation's most pristine wildernesses, and President Biden's actions would ensure there's a home and a future for some of the most diverse wildlife in the world, including polar bears, birds that travel from all seven continents to nest, and the largest caribou herds in the world. Experts agree that oil and gas drilling would devastate this fragile habitat and the wildlife that depend on it.*

### **6) Two messages focused specifically on the historic nature of President Biden's climate actions are essential for reaching key base audiences.**

We included in the survey two messages that frame President Biden as having done more on both climate and conservation than any past president:

***[#1 Conservation President]** President Biden has done more than any recent president to protect our public lands and waters for future generations. His leadership has our country on a path to conserve 30% of public lands and waters by 2030, with over 26 million acres of public lands already conserved. This includes 13 million acres of new protections in America's Western Arctic, one of our country's last and most expansive and thriving, biologically diverse landscapes.*

**[#1 Climate President]** *President Biden has taken more actions to fight climate change than any other president in history, including passing the most consequential climate law ever that will cut carbon pollution in half by 2030, create tens of thousands of new clean-energy jobs, and make major investments to transition to a clean energy economy. President Biden's efforts to limit oil and gas drilling in the Arctic would be an important addition to the work he has done.*

Each of these messages is incredibly important for making the case for the administration to “climate youth”—those under the age of 35 who say that climate change and/or conservation are of high personal importance. This audience has especially low awareness that President Biden has taken any real action on climate while in office. These factors—high personal salience and general skepticism—make it all the more important that they be educated about and persuaded of the historic nature of these actions.

**7) When pushing back on criticisms about gas prices, our strongest course of action is to continue to cite oil company profiteering and price gouging as the real cause of high energy prices.**

Another of our top-testing messages from the survey serves to redirect criticism for gas price increases back where it belongs: on oil company greed. This pushback is credible and potent.

**[Gas Prices]** *Evidence shows that more drilling won't lower the prices that working Americans pay at the pump and President Biden knows it. The oil companies just want to drill more so they can profit more, not so they can lower prices. Because President Biden gets it, he would limit drilling in the Arctic-and all the environmental damage that comes along with it-and invest instead in affordable clean energy, which will actually lower prices for Americans.*

This finding confirms what we have seen time and again in previous research on other aspects of climate policy—it is important to have a foil in this debate, and Big Oil is a good foil to have.

Indeed, in a separate experiment in this survey we tested two possible responses to a direct criticism that reducing drilling increases costs for consumers: (a) that the blame actually belongs with oil companies' profiteering and price gauging and (b) that the U.S. has so much oil and gas from other areas of the country that Arctic oil would not affect prices. Consistently across the public, but especially with young people who care deeply about climate change, the oil company version of the response gives us a winning talking point, whereas we narrowly “lose” the argument when we cite existing supply.